



4.10 Caroline Rannersberger *Romantic Cannon Hill Triptych* 2007, relief printing and drawing on Magnani pesca paper, 100 x 270 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Again Taylor explains:

These designs are said to have been owned by the original creator beings and passed on to humans at the end of the creation period. The designs are thus considered to be inherently powerful and communicate their power to the wearer.²⁴

Mawurndjul is one of several artists working with the art centre, Maningrida Arts and Culture. As with many Indigenous artists in the Northern Territory the art centre manages the commercial aspect of art production on behalf of the artists. This enables artists such as Mawurndjul freedom to work as he wishes and an income to support his practice.

CAROLINE RANNERSBERGER

Summarising her perceptions of the Northern Territory's Top End landscape, Caroline Rannersberger stated in 2010:

Indigenous culture is dominant; country is characterised by metaphysical presences invisible and inaccessible to the uninitiated. Interwoven into this rich territory is the sensation of the land itself: the geomorphic mass of ancient forms, the gravitational force of tidal rhythms, the cyclonic winds evolving from cyclical oceanic patterns.²⁵

Observations like these have underpinned Rannersberger's art practice of the past five years. Together with her German heritage – the mythological and the actual – she has drawn from five centuries of literature, philosophy, visual arts, music and

global exploration. This complex mix has led Rannersberger to view her art output – and the relationship between artist, philosophy and subject matter – as emerging from the dynamics of her surroundings and her thoughts.

Rannersberger came to the Territory in 2001 and, in her words, "fell in love with the place".²⁶ At first she lived in Jabiru, in Kakadu National Park, and managed the annual Wind (*Mahbili*) Festival there, as well as coming to terms with a landscape, powerful and perplexing. She decided to make it the basis of her further academic studies which combined making art with a journey in analysis through words.

Like many non-Indigenous Territory artists who choose landscape as their subject matter Rannersberger was torn between the unrelenting hold the landscape had on her and the doubt posed by colonial seizure of that land from Indigenous people, together with the layers of interpretation imposed by the imperial gaze, which all but extinguished Indigenous knowledge and animation of the land. Thus began a long journey in a short time for Rannersberger, unpicking the complexities that painting the land held.

One measure she adopted at first was to use printmaking as her vehicle:

The reason I went to printmaking was because I felt the immediate mark was just too prescriptive and dogmatic – and problematic. ... Print-making, though, is a removed process. ... What you produce is mediated by those processes and the direct mark is avoided – it becomes less personal.²⁷



4.11 Caroline Rannersberger *Sublime Territory III* 2007, relief printing and painting on Magnani pescia paper, 168 x 228 cm. Courtesy of the artist

An exhibition called 'Sublime Journey', mounted in 2007 at the Charles Darwin University printmaking gallery, Northern Editions, featured etchings based on landscapes she had seen on her travels in Australia and figures on journeys drawn from German literature; in particular, *Simplicissimus*.²⁸ Text from the 1669 novel, *The Adventurous Simplicissimus*, featured in the etchings and referred the earth, air, fire, water: elements which Simplicissimus like other travellers was to use or overcome. A large triptych Rannersberger also produced that year (4.10) featured Cannon Hill, a major site of the Buntj people in Kakadu National Park.

Early doubts about rendering Territory land at all, given Indigenous precedents, were resolved to some degree by Rannersberger's discovery of illustrations by South Australian colonial artist George French Angas. He created many water-colours, from which prints were made, of Territory scenes to which he had never travelled in person. Written accounts of landforms and sites to which European explorers had travelled were used by several artists, including Angas, to recreate the scenes for publication.

How could you visually express a place without actually going there and drawing? Maybe that thought meant it transcended location. Perhaps there is a something about place that transcends fixed boundaries – that the land had its own life that could communicate in other realms. Maybe Angas could get a sense of that land by reading or hearing about it.²⁹

Rannersberger used Angas' image of Adelaide River in her 2007 work *Sublime Territory III* (4.11). She also used it as a jumping off point for further ruminations on the nature of landscape painting in the Territory in a 'post' post-modern context.

I was caught then by the idea of the European gaze constructing the landscape ... I became interested at the same time by the idea of the void, by the idea that you could lose yourself in the landscape. ... Rather than representing what I see in nature, I represent what I feel – whether that be awe, love or something deeper still.³⁰

Nicolas Rothwell attributes this last claim of Rannersberger to the German romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich. It is seminal to her most recent practice where she unifies all the currents informing her works, as well as the techniques and demeanours she engages in the process. The writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze – in particular the concept of geo-philosophy – have helped Rannersberger to develop her own ideas about

land(scape) as basis for her art practice. In her most recent exhibition 'Unsettling Country', with its highly charged and linguistically ambiguous title, she states:

His (Deleuze's) philosophy helps me move closer into the experience of painting, to become, in fact, the clouds themselves, the trace of breeze, the height of mounting pressure, the wash of rain. As a painter I become what I am painting: I am a becoming-painting.³¹

Rannersberger has been able to identify with the climatic rhythms of the Territory's Top End both in her choice of subject matter and her mode of manipulating mediums and surfaces. Paradoxically, by privileging the elemental dynamics of nature, to which she submits, she aims to no longer be at the centre of

the process.³² Harnessing the terminology of Deleuze she writes of her latest subject matter – the interaction of Top End nature and weather – thus:

Yet this region, by virtue of its remote tropical location and chaotic climatic conditions, resists the shackles of permanent striation, of permanent marking, to the extent that even permanent settlement becomes an insurmountable challenge. Country is territorialised, only to be deterritorialised at the whim of often unpredictable forces. ... the ecology of coastal mangrove habitats is 'smooth space par excellence', where striations constantly break and form new rhizomatic connections with each new tide, replenishing and regenerating existence itself.³³

4.12 Caroline Rannersberger *Mangrove and Monsoon I-V* 2010, pigment, beeswax, resin on oak wood panels, 74 x 130 cm

